

CAN YOU TOP THIS?

Unbelievable or outrageous true stories about everyday experiences in property management

BY SUZANNE E. LEWIS, CPM®, ARM®
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JIMMY WATKINS

FANNING THE FLAMES



SUE LEWIS, CPM, ARM (SLEWISCPM@COMCAST.NET), HAS OVER 20 YEARS OF PROPERTY MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE. CURRENTLY, SHE SERVES AS MEMBERSHIP ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE RENTAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION OF PUGET SOUND, WASH. ACTIVE IN IREM FOR 10 YEARS LEWIS IS ALSO THE 2008 IREM CHAPTER #27 PRESIDENT FOR WESTERN WASHINGTON AND THE NATIONAL CHAIR FOR THE JPM ADVISORY BOARD.

One of the more memorable resident situations I remember happened in the fall a few years ago. My maintenance supervisor received a call from a resident stating that his apartment had a small fire. The supervisor asked the resident if he had used the fire extinguisher available just outside the door and the resident said he had not. The resident shared that he didn't want to leave his apartment because he thought he should keep an eye on the flames.

At this point my maintenance supervisor asked if the fire was out and was told, "No, it had just started."

The supervisor then asked the resident if he was still in the apartment and the resident replied, "Yes, I just told you I'm keeping my eyes on the flames."

My maintenance supervisor told the resident to leave the apartment immediately and to pull the fire alarm for the building. The resident next asked, "Won't you get charged if the fire department comes?"

Realizing he needed to take swift control, the supervisor called the local fire department and soon after called additional support staff to come help evacuate the building as soon as he saw how bad the fire was.

Once the fire department extinguished the fire and assured all individuals were safe, we



were able to debrief as a staff on the details of the fire. This is what we learned:

- The resident ignored the fireplace instructions and filled the insert with a combination of a couple of Presto logs and wood.
- The resident used an instant starter log, ignoring the rule against their use.
- The resident ignored the package instructions by placing the starter log under the grate box.
- When the house got too hot, the resident opened the windows and patio door to get cold air, and the breeze further fueled the flames.

Ultimately, the fireplace area got so hot it liquefied and started to burn the tile glue and areas under and around the fireplace. This then set the surrounding walls on fire. When questioned again about not calling the fire department, the resident further explained that he didn't call them because he was concerned that we would be charged for the call. He also reasoned that the maintenance supervisor

was closer to come put out the fire anyway.

Thankfully, the resident did have insurance and the several thousands of dollars in damage were covered. Unfortunately, the damage done to the neighbors' personal possessions were not.



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